

Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council
JANUARY 25, 2012

NATURAL RESOURCES BUILDING
1111 WASHINGTON STREET SE
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON
ROOM 461
10:10 A.M. – 11:35 A.M.

Voting members present on phone: Len Barson, Al Black, Janelle Downs, Cherie Kearney, Bob Meier, Wade Troutman. Ex Officio members present in person: Jeanne Koenings (Department of Ecology), Steve McLellan (Recreation and Conservation Office), Elizabeth Rodrick (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) and Julie Sackett (Department of Natural Resources). Ex Officio members present on the phone: Rob Fimbel (State Parks and Recreation)

Members absent: John Banks, Peter Dunwiddie (Two positions are vacant)

DNR Staff: John Gamon, DeAnn Johnigk, Pene Speaks; Others present: Chris Hempleman (Department of Ecology)

AGENDA

I. Introductions

Council Chair Black called the meeting to order (10:10 am) and asked everyone to introduce themselves, including those on the phone and in the meeting room. Three new ex officio members were introduced: Steve McLellan will be representing RCO, Julie Sackett will be representing DNR and Chris Hempleman will be taking Jeanne Koenings place for the Department of Ecology. Jeanne is retiring this month.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes
Minutes of the October 12, 2011 meeting

The minutes of the October 12, 2011 meeting were presented for approval (the draft minutes had been distributed to the Council prior to the meeting).

A motion to approve the Minutes of the October 12, 2011, meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council as presented was made by Janelle Downs, seconded by Len Barson. The motion passed unanimously (members on the telephone stated their names and votes).

III. New Business
Selection of Council Chair

Background: At the last Council meeting, Chair Al Black stated his intention to step down as chair of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council. Discussion at that meeting resulted in Cherie Kearney being identified as a candidate to succeed Chair Black. She indicated that she wanted to have discussions with other potential candidates to gauge their interest in being chair. Through this informal process, Cherie Kearney emerged as the candidate to succeed Black as Council Chair.

There was discussion regarding the advantage of having the chair attend meetings in person. Al Black commented that it was difficult to chair the meeting without being present in person, and that he anticipated not attending meetings in person, at least under the current budget limitations. Kearney also indicated that it was probable that she would participate in most meetings via the telephone. Kearney suggested that the Chair, if not present in person, could in an ad hoc manner appoint someone who was present in person to chair any given meeting. Black reiterated his desire to step down as Chair.

A motion was made by Len Barson to select Cherie Kearney as the next Council Chair. Wade Troutman seconded. The motion passed unanimously (members on the telephone stated their names and votes).

Following passage of the above motion, it was agreed that Al Black would chair the remainder of this meeting and that Cherie Kearney would assume the Chair at its close. Council members and staff expressed their gratitude to Al Black for his long commitment to chair the Council and to Cherie Kearney for her willingness to assume those duties.

IV. Old Business

Progress on Past Recommendations: Acquisitions Report –see written report

DeAnn Johnigk provided Special Lands Acquisition update. Lands that have been acquired since the October council meeting include four natural areas: Klickitat Canyon NRCA, Niawiakum River NAP, Elk River NRCA and Stavis NRCA. Johnigk provided an overview of each of the acquisitions. The most significant acquisition was at Klickitat Canyon NRCA, where 917+ acres were acquired, including a significant stretch of land along the canyon itself. She emphasized that the sellers of the parcel at Elk River NRCA were great to work with and that they are very pleased that their land is now in conservation status. There was discussion about whether or not there had been outreach to legislators and others regarding the acquisition efforts at that site. Len Barson suggested that it might be a positive step to provide legislators with an update.

Budget update:

Natural Heritage Program funding – strategy development

Pene Speaks and Julie Sackett provided a report on the status of the Natural Heritage Program's budget situation. Funds available at present can keep the program intact through June 2012. DNR convened a group of interested external parties about one month ago to help identify strategies to obtain the funds necessary to keep the program viable. One outcome of that meeting has been the development of a prospectus that outlines the program and its functions and identifies the costs associated with those functions. DNR's executive management has committed to searching for external sources of funding.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office

Steve McLellan indicated that for the next round of WWRP funding, project proponents will be asked to provide information on the long-term benefits of their projects. He indicated that there has been an interest on the part of legislators to demonstrate the values, including economic and social, associated with the projects. Speaks asked if the concept of ecosystem services was intended to be included. McLellan indicated that RCO was hoping to get clarification regarding whether to include ecosystem services benefits. He also indicated that RCO would seek clarification of other issues, such as how projects might impact adjacent property values.

Department of Ecology

Jeanne Koenings reported on the Department of Ecology's numerous grant projects. The agency submitted seven grants to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the National Coastal Wetlands program. All seven have received funding, totaling almost \$6 million. The projects include: Big Quilcene (acquisition and restoration), Colter Creek (acquisition), Crockett Lake (acquisition), Indian Point (acquisition), Smuggler's Slough (acquisition and restoration), Snow Creek (restoration), and Triangle Cove (acquisition).

DOE is also the lead agency for Washington for the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) grants provided through National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The grant application submitted by DNR for Dabob Bay NA was the number one proposal nationwide in the last funding period, so it will receive \$2.7 million for land acquisition.

DOE also provided funding for DNR to coordinate the removal of 60 tons of creosote contaminated beach debris.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Rob Fimbel reported that the agency is experiencing dramatic budget reductions due to reductions to state general fund appropriations. The Discover Pass revenues have not been sufficient to replace the lost funding. There may be as much as a 50% reduction in staffing. The trend is toward a non-profit model for supporting the state's parks. Fimbel also mentioned that the supplemental environmental impact statement is being released soon for a proposed Mt. Spokane ski area and lift development. He indicated that he has been busy doing risk assessment and reduction at forested state parks.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Elizabeth Rodrick reported on the joint efforts of WDFW, DNR and USFWS to prepare and submit "Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) land acquisition" proposals. Projects include: Mountain View (Asotin County), Heart of the Cascades (central Cascades), Dabob Bay (Jefferson County), Ashford Forest (near southwest corner of Mt. Rainier National Park), and Nemah and Naselle river drainages (southwest coastal). HCP land acquisition grants are used to acquire lands in support of existing HCPs. Two Section 6 species recovery land acquisition grants will also be submitted: one near Lake Wenatchee and one in the Blue Mountains. These grants are meant to help meet recovery objectives identified in approved recovery plans for federally listed species.

Department of Natural Resources

Speaks noted that the Legislative session was keeping DNR staff busy. The department, in partnership with DFW and State Parks, has proposed an amendment to the Discover Pass legislation that would allow coverage for more than one car with the purchase of one pass. There are also a number of other bills being tracked with particular concern about how the budget negotiations will play out.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report

A Natural Areas Program Report prepared by Curt Pavola was distributed to Council members. Speaks presented highlights from that written report. Len Barson asked whether Pinecroft NAP (located in Spokane) is still viable, given its small size and that it is surrounded by development. Speaks responded, acknowledging that the question has been raised before and that there are important policy issues that would need to be part of any decision to change the status of the NAP.

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report

Gamon provided an oral report on the activities of the Natural Heritage Program. A written summary of that report is attached to these Minutes.

VIII. Other Business

Speaks indicated that there are two Council positions that are currently vacant. One was held by George Rohrbacher, who recently resigned. His position was an at-large position. There is also a scientist position that is vacant. There was some discussion regarding whether there were particular needs in terms of geographic areas or scientific disciplines. DNR staff agreed to prepare information regarding the disciplines currently represented on the Council and share that with the Council for further consideration.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35.